

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-02 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-12

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SUBJECT: MARCOS CALLS FOR POPULAR CONSULTATION WITH BARANGAY/
CITIZENS ASSEMBLIES

REF: (A) MANILA 6148

(B) MANILA A-169

SUMMARY: PRESIDENT MARCOS HAS SET JULY 24 AND JULY 27 AS
DATES FOR MEETINGS OF 35,000 BARANGAYS (CITIZENS ASSEMBLIES)
TO CONSIDER, RESPECTIVELY, LOCAL AND NATIONAL ISSUES IN WHAT
GOVERNMENT IS DESCRIBING AS NATIONAL REFERENDUM. REGISTRA-
TION OF ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS (ESTIMATED TO EXCEED 20 MIL-
LION) IS PROCEEDING. WHICH ISSUES OF NATIONAL CONSEQUENCE
WILL BE PUT BEFORE BARANGAYS IS STILL UNCLEAR. BASED ON
JANUARY PRECEDENT WHEN CITIZENS ASSEMBLIES WERE FIRST
CONVENED, IT APPEARS HIGHLY PROBABLE THAT GOVERNMENT WILL
PREPARE DESIRED ANSWERS AS WELL AS QUESTIONS AND WILL
TIGHTLY CONTROL RESULTS OF MEETINGS, EVEN IF SECRET BAL-
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LOTING ALLOWED. END SUMMARY

1. DATES FOR NEXT MEETINGS OF BARANGAYS (CITIZENS ASSEMBLIES) THROUGHOUT PHILIPPINES HAVE NOW BEEN ANNOUNCED. ACCORDING PRESS, PRESIDENT MARCOS SIGNED DECREE NO. 227 ON JUNE 26 WHICH, INTER ALIA, (1) ESTABLISHED JULY 27 AS DATE FOR 35,000 BARANGAYS TO MEET TO DECIDE UNSPECIFIED ISSUES OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE; (2) SCHEDULED MEETINGS OF SAME GROUPS ON JULY 24 TO CONSIDER LOCAL PROBLEMS; (3) CHARGED THE RECENTLY REORGANIZED COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS (COMELEC) WITH DETERMINING THE QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED THE BARANGAYS; AND (4) VALIDATED FOR PURPOSES OF CURRENT REGISTRATION DRIVE LISTS OF VOTERS REGISTERED FOR 1971 ELECTIONS AND LISTS OF VOTERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN JAN 1973 MEETINGS OF CITIZENS ASSEMBLIES.

2. QUESTIONS TO BE DECIDED IN JULY 27 " REFERENDUM" HAVE NOT YET BEEN ANNOUNCED. ACCORDING TO ITS NEW CHAIRMAN, FORMER SENATOR LEONARDO PEREZ, COMELEC HAS INVITED LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND CIVIC, LABOR, RELIGIOUS AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS TO SUBMIT SUGGESTIONS FOR APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS TO BE DECIDED BY BARANGAYS. HOWEVER, EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS FROM RELIABLE SOURCE THAT AT LEAST SOME FORMER CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION DELEGATES HAVE ALREADY RECEIVED LIST OF INTENDED QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED ANSWERS. RECENT EDITORIAL IN DAILY EXPRESS, WHICH HAS CLOSE TIES TO MALACANANG, SAID THAT NOT ONLY NATIONAL ISSUES BUT QUESTIONS AFFECTING PHILIPPINE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS WOULD BE DECIDED ON. JULY 24 MEETINGS WILL ONLY CONSIDER SUCH LOCAL MATTERS AS IRRIGATION, ROADS, PRICES AND FAMILY PLANNING AND WILL BE CONDUCTED BY OPEN VOTE, ACCORDING DEPT PUBLIC INFORMATION PRESS BULLETIN.

3. DURING JUNE 26 CALL ON SECRETARY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT JOSE RONO, POLITICAL COUNSELOR WAS TOLD THAT SERIOUS CONSIDERATION IS BEING GIVEN TO USING SECRET BALLOTS IN JULY 27 REFERENDUM. RONO ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THERE HAD BEEN CONSIDERABLE CRITICISM OF OPEN NATURE OF VOTING IN JANUARY BARANGAY MEETINGS. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION, HE STATED QUESTIONS TO BE PUT TO BARANGAYS IN THE SECOND ROUND OF NATIONAL CONSULTATION HAVE NOT BEEN DECIDED.

4. REGISTRATION OF BARANGAY MEMBERS NOW BEING CONDUCTED DURING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TWO- WEEK PERIOD ENDING JULY 4 WITH GOAL OF ENROLLING ALL CITIZENS AGE 15 AND ABOVE (ESTIMATED TO EXCEED 20 MILLION). FOR FIRST TIME, ILLITERATES ARE ALLOWED TO REGISTER. WHILE ALMOST 400,000 PERSONS WERE REPORTED TO HAVE REGISTERED IN MANILA IN FIRST WEEK, IT WOULD SEEM TO BE PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO REGISTER ALL POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS THROUGHOUT COUNTRY IN ONLY TWO WEEKS. THIS TASK HAS BEEN EASED BY CONSIDERING

AS ALREADY REGISTERED ALL 1971 VOTERS (11.6 MILLION) AND THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED IN JANUARY CONSULTATIONS (GOVT CLAIMS THIS FIGURE WAS 15.7 MILLION BUT EMBASSY ESTIMATES LESS THAN A THIRD THAT MANY ACTUALLY INVOLVED). WHILE NEW CONSTITUTION LOWERS MINIMUM AGE FOR FRANCHISE FROM 21 TO 18, DECREE NO. 210 DATED JUNE 6 REQUIRES MANDATORY REGISTRATION OF ALL FILIPINOS 15 AND OLDER. THIS EFFECTIVELY EXTENDS TO AGE GROUP 15 - 18 RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE AND VOTE IN BARANGAY MEETINGS BUT APPARENTLY NOT IN ACTUAL ELECTIONS.

5. COMMENT: WHILE GOVT SEEKING TO GIVE PHILIPPINE PUBLIC IMPRESSION THAT BARANGAY MECHANISM CONSTITUTES DEMOCRATIC FORM OF POPULAR CONSULTATION ON NATIONAL ISSUES, MOST FILIPINOS REMAIN SKEPTICAL THAT NEW " REFERENDUM" WILL DIFFER GREATLY FROM THAT HELD IN JANUARY. IT WILL BE RECALLED THAT " RESULTS" OF THESE EARLIER MEETINGS APPROVED DRAFT CONSTITUTION, REJECTED ANY MEETINGS OF A LEGISLATIVE BODY, ENDORSED MARTIAL LAW AND NEW SOCIETY REFORMS AND OPPOSED HOLDING OF ELECTIONS FOR SEVEN YEARS. SIMILAR QUESTIONS WILL PROBABLY BE ASKED THIS TIME AS MARCOS ATTEMPTS TO CREATE APPEARANCE OF POPULAR APPROVAL FOR HIS NEXT POLITICAL MOVES. FORMULATION OF QUESTIONS THEMSELVES AS WELL AS DESIRED ANSWERS EXPECTED TO BE TIGHTLY OVERSEEN ONCE AGAIN BY MALACANANG, POSSIBILITY THAT SECRET BALLOTING WILL BE PERMITTED SHOULD NOT BE DISCOUNTED SINCE COMELEC, NOW DOMINATED BY HAND PICKED MARCOS POLITICIANS, IS IN POSITION EFFECTIVELY TO CONTROL RESULTS OF BARANGAY VOTING ACCORDING TO PRESIDENT'S WISHES.

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